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ABSTRACT

In order to obtain teachers' views concerning art and music instruction in elementary schools, a 38-item opinionnaire was developed and distributed to a randomly selected sample of 236 grade school teachers in Illinois. Items solicited demographic data (e.g., grade level taught, years of teaching, and preparatory arts courses taken) and surveyed aspects of arts programs such as adequacy of budgets, level of integration of the arts in the basic curriculum, and perceptions of the importance of the arts in the total curriculum. Generally, the 161 teachers who responded to the survey, held positive views of the arts and favored incorporating art and music into the basic curriculum. Respondents reported, however, that little time was devoted to instruction in art and music. Additional findings are detailed, and recommendations are advanced for providing instruction in the arts when financial resources are low.
(Author/RH)

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Austerity vs. Aesthetics in the Elementary School Program

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ABSTRACT

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A randomly selected sample of 236 elementary level classroom teachers in Illinois were mailed opinionaires regarding their views of the importance of art/music instruction, who was conducting such classes, amount of time spent teaching art/music and their perceived qualifications for teaching the subjects.

A total of 68% of the teachers returned the opinionaires and the results are discussed in the article. Some demographic data concerning the teachers also is presented along with some conclusions and recommendations.

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AUSTERITY VS. AESTHETICS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Due to an inadequacy of funds to maintain budgets and the public call to a "back to basics" curriculum, the need for fine arts education has appeared increasingly less important to administrators and school boards. Consequently, a number of arts (art and music) programs provided by teachers trained and certified to teach art and music have been curtailed or eliminated in many school districts. Budget cuts have resulted in reductions in personnel and programs which have led to cuts in art/music instruction without too much public opposition.

As school districts face reductions in staff and programs in the arts, it is evident that colleges and universities involved in teacher training must become actively involved in adapting their educational programs to such changes.

Many elementary classroom teachers are presently in districts in which instruction in the arts is their responsibility. Therefore, it is important to determine the adequacy of their preparation to offer such programs as well as their perceptions of the value of art and music in the curriculum.

Background of the Study

In 1966 the future of art in the schools looked promising, and much attention is still focused on the art of children. Although numerous books have been published attesting to the new importance that art for children has assumed and research articles are regularly published dealing with children's art, the situation today is quite different in terms of practicalities. (Brittain[1]) In today's environment of decreasing funds for fine arts education and an oversupply of teachers for all types of available teaching positions, it is not the time to economize on high standards for elementary arts education.

Lewis[2] feels that "the teacher is undoubtedly the single most important factor in establishing the emotional climate of the classroom." For the teacher who is creative in the approach to teaching, to art, and to life, this quality will be helpful in engendering a creative attitude in pupils. However, Eisner emphasized that "elementary school teachers are not particularly well prepared to teach art. Their own experience when students in elementary schools has been limited and they don't feel comfortable in the teaching of fine arts. Their experience and training in art education has been meager. Many teacher education programs require no training in art education as an aspect of teacher preparation... Many elementary teachers had their last exposure to a trained art teacher at the junior high school level." (Eisner[3], p. 16) Even though most art instruction that elementary children receive is from regular classroom teachers, it is unrealistic to expect these teachers to

demonstrate much enthusiasm for a subject for which they feel unprepared. Because most children tend to like the arts when they begin school, teacher indifference towards the arts can confuse or affect them negatively.

In addition to considering the reality of lack of training for many educators in the arts, it is important to realize that costs for salaries and supplies are constantly rising thereby threatening the scope and even the existence of many programs. Costs of some art materials have doubled in a few years' time and declining enrollments result in drastic budget reductions. We need to be aware of the effects on education and arts education when there is a reversal of prosperity in the nation. It is important to remember that decisions made now by boards of education will affect the lives of students in the schools for years to come. Many education administrators have not been exposed in their professional training to the value of the contribution of the arts.

Inflation and the public sentiment that passed California's Proposition 13 make it imperative for public schools to show immediate educational benefits if possible. In response to the "back to basics" movement, some art educators advocate an interdependence of the arts and academics in order to save the arts programs (Eisner[3]). Arts in education as a movement is gaining some momentum, but the latest proposed national budget cuts to the arts and humanities will affect art education seriously. For over a decade the U.S. Office of Education Arts and Humanities Division has used the term "arts in education" to encourage

1. A strong sequential, ordered education in each of the arts.
2. An educational program that integrates the arts into the basic curriculum.
3. Regular opportunities to relate to living artists as performers. (Fineberg[4])

The Pennsylvania Department of Education took the lead in 1973 among states

establishing the Arts in Basic Education as a statewide educational priority. Since that time 20 other state education departments have begun to plan and initiate comprehensive arts in education programs. That the arts are basic tools for learning for all children is the basis of the plans. The image of art as a vehicle only for recreation has to be changed in order for art to survive in the schools.

It is estimated that less than three percent of school time per week is devoted to art in elementary schools at the present time. But reading, writing and arithmetic now consume about sixty to seventy percent of the instructional time in elementary schools in the United States. Parents are concerned about reported lower performances in these areas and so the teaching of the arts is being superceded by that of the basics. According to the National Art Education Association[5] every elementary school child should receive a minimum of 100 minutes per week of

regularly scheduled art instruction from a certified art teacher. However, many schools fail to meet this recommendation.

Another cause for concern for teaching of the arts is the emphasis placed on achievement testing and accountability. These have greatly influenced the priorities established by teachers, administrators and school boards.

Accountability is heard from all segments of society interested in the improvement of our public schools. It is sometimes difficult for art educators to prove or test to show that their students are achieving stated objectives as can teachers of English or mathematics. Competency based education which has been hailed along with the idea of accountability is oftentimes difficult for arts educators to use as a tool of teaching. Regardless of accountability problems, many educators denounce the connotation that art is a "frill." Williams[6] defends the importance of the arts by stating "important new evidence

shows not only that the arts are beneficial in themselves, but also that their introduction into a school's curriculum causes marked improvement in mathematics, reading, science and other subjects that the educationists pronounce 'essential.'

Soyars[7] warns of a dehumanized future if school districts discard music programs as "frills." He feels a major national problem can result "if the current threats to eliminate music from high school programs are carried out on a broad scale, the future could look pretty bleak. Imagine a generation that has grown up without the cultural education now offered in the public schools, and without the sensitivity to beauty. Then I think, we would face a cold, stark, almost inhuman kind of existence in the United States." (p. 32)

According to a Rockefeller report based upon the findings of a distinguished panel, the members "support the concept of 'basic education,' but maintain that the arts, properly taught,

are basic to individual development since they more than any other subject awaken all the senses--learning pores. We endorse a curriculum which puts 'basics' first, because the arts are basic, right at the heart of the matter. And we suggest not that reading be replaced by art but that the concept of literacy be expanded beyond word skills."[8] (p. 6)

Culture in America will not die since there are too many values connected with it. The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association in cooperation with the American Association of School Administrators published five separate rationales for including fine arts in education. They are summarized as follows:

1. Historical Rationale - art has always been important.
2. Therapy Rational - the arts help a person who has a problem feel better.
3. Creativity Rationale - the arts help people to exercise and stimulate creativity.

4. Acceptance of Subjectivity - the arts provide a setting in which people can learn to accept their own limited abilities.

5. Leisure Rationale - the arts provide a more enjoyable and meaningful use of leisure time.

(Wright[9], p. 17)

Design of the Survey

In order to solicit the views of elementary level classroom teachers concerning instruction in the arts, the researchers developed a 38 item opinionaire. The items include demographic data, e.g. grade level taught, years of teaching, preparatory arts courses taken, as well as opinions concerning the arts program in their schools, e.g. adequacy of budgets, level of integration of the arts in the basic curriculum, perception of importance of the arts in the total curriculum. The items in the opinionaire were designed with multiple choice responses which were recorded on computer-scored scanner sheets.

Population

A randomly selected sample of 236 elementary level classroom teachers in the State of Illinois was supplied by the State Board of Education. One hundred sixty-one (68%) subjects completed and returned the opinionaire. Of the respondents, 144 (89%) were female, 17 (11%) were male and 96 (60%) taught grades K-3 and 64 (40%) taught grades 4 through 6. Their years of teaching experience were: 27 (17%) with one to four years, 41 (25%) with five to nine years, 74 (46%) with ten to twenty years, and 19 (12%) with over twenty years.

Procedure

Each subject in the selected sample received by mail to the school address a packet of materials including a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, the opinionaire and answer sheet, and a postpaid return envelope. The participation of the subjects was voluntary and anonymous. After return of the answer sheets, they were computer scored.

Findings

The elementary teachers who participated in the survey expressed views which are consistent with that found in the literature. They held positive views of the arts, believing that they are not "frill" subjects and should be taught as courses. Furthermore, they favored incorporating art and music into the basic curricular offerings. In addition to advocating the devotion of in class time to the arts, the vast majority of the teachers (91%) indicated that students' accomplishments in art and music were routinely displayed to the public at occasions such as open houses, PTA meetings, etc. Parents and the community at large take great pride in seeing their youth contribute in this fashion, and, in fact, would most likely be disappointed if this common practice were discontinued.

In spite of the support of teachers and the expectations of parents and the community, the teachers reported that little time was devoted to instruction in art and music.

In those settings in which a specialist in art is available, the per week instruction offered is less than one hour in length as reported by 70 (77%) teachers, between one and three hours in 18 (20%) cases, and more than three hours in 3 (3%) cases. In settings in which the regular classroom teachers are responsible for providing art instruction, the length of time devoted per week is less than one hour in 48 (43%) cases, between one and three hours in 56 (51%) cases, and more than three hours in 7 (6%) cases. The data indicate that regular elementary classroom teachers responsible for providing art instruction devote more time to that instruction than specialized art teachers with the same responsibility.

In the music area, the data show the reverse situation. Instruction provided by music specialists in 75 (51%) cases is less than one hour per week in duration, in 70 (48%) cases is one to three hours, and in one (1%) case, more than three hours. Instruction provided by the regular elementary

classroom teacher in 40 (68%) is less than one hour in length, in 19 (32%) is one to three hours, and in no cases does instruction exceed three hours. The length of time devoted to music instruction by specialized teachers is greater than that provided by regular elementary classroom teachers.

Approximately half of the teachers surveyed reported that specialists certified to teach art provide art instruction in their schools. This percentage remained constant when the teachers were divided into subgroups based on sex, grade level taught, and years of teaching experience.

Specialists certified to teach music provide instruction for 147 (91%) of the teachers surveyed. This percentage varied only slightly when the teachers were divided by sex, grade level, and years of teaching experience.

Analysis of the data shows that 25% of the teachers reported art instruction is conducted by both specialized art teachers and regular classroom teachers.

In the area of music instruction, this overlap was reported by 27% of the respondents.

Since this study did not address the issues of quality of instruction or the propriety of curriculum content, discussion of the length of time devoted to art and music instruction by regular classroom teachers and specialists must be speculative in nature. The schedules of the specialists may be dependent on the number of groups which they instruct as well as the geography of the schools on their "circuit." Therefore, they have minimal control over the duration of the instruction they provide.

On the other hand, the duration of instruction provided by the classroom teacher may be more variable and may depend on the teachers' desire and competence (both actual and perceived) to teach art and music.

The preparation of elementary classroom teachers in the areas of art and music is similar. Sixty-nine percent of the teachers surveyed had completed either one or two college courses

in art while 74% had taken one or two college courses in music. The remaining teachers had taken three or more courses. For 69% of the teachers one of the art courses studied was art appreciation, and for 74% one of the music courses was music appreciation. Most of the teachers (88%) engage in hobbies or part-times involving art and/or crafts, but only 42% reported that they played the piano and 66% that they are capable of reading music.

Quantitatively the preparation of the teachers in art and music is similar. However, the perceived competence to instruct in the two areas differs significantly. This establishes a need to investigate the course content and quality of instruction provided in the college offerings.

The data indicate that classroom teachers who do provide instruction in art and music spend more time teaching art. Perhaps this is explained by describing art instruction as teaching technique, which can be accomplished in a group or classroom situation. In

contrast, music instruction may involve skill development, a very individualized activity at the elementary level. While variations of quality and rate of accomplishment are acceptable and even desirable in art, in music more group discipline is required to prevent the cacophony of small child noises.

The section of the opinionaire devoted to an examination of the preparation of teachers to provide instruction in the arts yielded data pointing to different views of the art and music areas.

Eighty-nine (55%) of the total teachers surveyed reported that they feel qualified to teach art with those remaining reporting that they are not qualified. This proportion was consistent among subgroups divided by sex and years of teaching experience, although the teachers with the least experience, one to four years, showed a slightly lower percentage, 48%, feeling qualified to teach art. Sixty-four percent of the primary grade (K-3) teachers reported as qualified to teach

art while only 42 percent of the middle grades (4-6) teachers feel qualified.

In the area of music, the data showed very different results. Only 38 (24%) teachers felt qualified to teach music, while 123 (76%) did not. In the subgroups based on sex, 12% of the male and 25% of the female teachers felt qualified, while 28% of the primary level and 16% of the middle grade teachers felt qualified. Among the subgroups divided by years of teaching experience, there was little difference in the proportion of those feeling qualified to teach music. Each subgroup responded with approximately 22% qualified.

In general, the teachers believed that the budgets for art and music supplies are adequate in their schools. Seventy-six percent of the teachers reported that music budgets were adequate while 65% reported that the art budgets were adequate. However, 65% of the teachers responded that they purchased, out of their own pockets, art supplies for use in their classrooms. In music

only 8% of the teachers made such purchases.

Recommendations

In this time of budget tightening at all levels of public financing, it would be unrealistic and counterproductive to demand that large numbers of specialists in art and music be employed to offer such instruction in all elementary schools. Instead, alternatives must be found which provide for art and music instruction within budgetary limitations. Salient among these alternatives should be:

1. In-service training for elementary classroom teachers should be provided in order to assist them in the instruction of art and music as well as methods for integrating the arts into curricular offerings such as social studies and the humanities. Such training should be conducted by specialists who are also available to serve as consultants to teachers as situations of special need develop. In this manner school districts may employ a

limited number of specialists in art and music and/or maximize the time of those already employed.

2. Teacher training institutions should instruct prospective teachers in methods of integrating art and music into the curriculum. If the addition of such a requirement is not possible due to an already burdened curriculum, it could be incorporated into other methods courses, e.g. methods of teaching social science, as well as into courses such as educational psychology or child development which include topics in perceptual development, coordination, and learning. These courses are already required by most states for teacher certification.

3. School administrators must be responsible for the inclusion of instruction in art and music in the curriculum and for emphasizing the value of integrating such instruction in the total school program. This aspect of the program

along with all others must be brought to the attention of the district's constituents, students, teachers, parents, and community.

It is imperative that these and other alternatives be investigated and, when deemed appropriate, implemented. Furthermore, additional study is needed to determine many of the qualitative issues not addressed in this study such as the content and quality of the college courses completed by the classroom teachers, the actual competence of classroom teachers who are responsible for providing instruction in art and music, the content of instruction in art and music in the elementary schools and its propriety.

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